

Poll: Utahns Warming Up to Nuclear Plant Idea

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Richard Piatt reporting

Most Utahns are still saying "no" to the idea of building a nuclear power plant in Utah, but a recent poll for KSL and the Deseret Morning news shows a lot of people are open to the idea too.

There is still a long way to go before construction on a nuclear power plant is even considered. However, the idea is getting a lot of time at the State Capitol as lawmakers waded through the pros and cons of nuclear power.

A legislative committee is thinking of OK'ing a bill to encourage a nuclear plant project near the Green River in Emery County. The state has debated nuclear power before, in the late '70s.



In 2007, most Utahns in a Dan Jones survey of 603 people say "no." Forty-five percent said "probably not" or "definitely not" last week, while 38 percent say they're "probably open" or "definitely open" to the idea.

A lot of Utahns recognize the power needs of the future as the state grows, but there are also nagging concerns for others about water consumption and nuclear waste.

Critics also say it's too costly, in a lot of ways, when alternatives are available. "We could take those same amounts of effort and resources and build many more renewable resources in this state, and it would have a much larger economic impact in this state overall, plus get us where we need to go," explained Tim Wagner of the Utah Sierra Club.

Springville Rep. Aaron Tilton said, "There is a difference between a private fuel storage project, which we are not involved with, and the generation of power through nuclear energy. Those are two separate issues, completely different."



Tilton is one of two lawmakers spearheading the idea. He also owns a company that could build the plant, and many people accuse him of a conflict of interest, which he denies.

"The state has no involvement in permitting a nuclear power plant, and so the involvement in the state is almost peripherally observing a federal issue. So, my role as a legislator doesn't play into that factor," Tilton said.

However, Wagner disagrees. "An elected official who is sitting on a committee that would be vetting a rule where he would eventually potentially be benefiting from that rule, I think that's a major conflict of interest," Wagner said.

Regardless of Tilton's interest in the matter, the fact is nuclear power is getting a real chance to happen in this state. Comparing this latest poll with public opinion in the past, it appears Utahns are warming to the idea, just a little bit.